

# **How Does the Comprehensive Plan Address Issues Facing the District? An Analysis of the District Elements of Comprehensive Plan for the Nation's Capital**

## **Overview**

Numerous large and small issues face the District of Columbia. Some of the key issues that relate to the city's development, redevelopment and future growth are highlighted below. The Office of Planning developed this list of key issues in consultation with other city agencies ("internal stakeholders") and based on conversations with a wide range of community interest groups ("external stakeholders"). The initial list was then compared against the issues raised by Task Force members in the electronic survey. Many of the issues are the same.

Following a brief listing of the issues facing the District, a matrix assessing how well these issues are addressed in the Comp Plan is presented. Thereafter, the paper presents the perspectives of both internal agency stakeholders and external stakeholders on three of these issues to highlight their views of the Comp Plan and how it addresses these issues. The paper concluded with a discussion on how other cities' plans address issues.

## **What are the Key Issues Facing the District?**

Below is a listing of key issue areas. Three of these topics are discussed in more detail in the text that follows below, which includes some of the stakeholders' insights.

A large number of land use, housing and economic development issues facing the District can generally be grouped together. These include issues related to locating public facilities, employment and job skills; transportation; affordable housing; parks and recreation; the Anacostia waterfront; transit oriented development; development of large sites; historic preservation; urban design; and fiscal health.

Other issues relate to interjurisdictional coordination; managing expected growth; the District's interconnectedness with the larger region and its special relationship with federal government. Still others deal with District services including education and providing for special needs population including youth, elderly, the poor and those that face the challenges of drug dependency. One important set of issues focus on civic participation and how to involve more citizens in the District government's decision-making process and make the process more inclusive.

How the Comp Plan addresses all of these issues and how well these are addressed is described in Table 1. This summary matrix is based an indepth review of the Comp Plan that is included in Appendix A. Additional discussion of these issues is also included the

Office of Planning's issue papers on these topics. (These are accessible through the Office of Planning's Website (<http://planning.dc.gov>)).<sup>1</sup>

### **How Well Does the Plan Address the Issues?**

Table 1 (on the next page) provides a summary of how well the citywide elements address the key issues. This analysis is based primarily on the judgment of the Comp Plan assessment consultants in consultation with the Office of Planning. This summary table is the result of a more in-depth analysis of the Comp Plan that is included in Appendix A, which provides a thumbnail description of the issues, identifies selected relevant citations from the Comp Plan, and discusses how well the Comp Plan addresses the issues.

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<sup>1</sup> Specific issue papers on Transit Oriented Development; Housing; Regional Context; Employment and Job Skills; Special Needs Populations; and Demographics are available now. Other issue papers are in development and will be placed on the Office of Planning's website as soon as they are finalized.

**Table 1. How Well Does the Comp Plan<sup>2</sup> Address Key Issues Facing the District?**

Issues	Addressed Thoroughly (Policies/Recommendations supported by analysis of data & trends)	Addressed Partially (Minimal analysis and connection to issues/trends)	Minimal Guidance/ Not Addressed	Comments
Relationship with Federal Government			X	The special relationship between the DC and federal governments and the issues encompassed by this relationship are not well articulated or addressed in a holistic manner.
Regional Context			X	The regional trends and issues that influence and affect the District, its land uses, demographics, transportation and service delivery demands are not a major focus of the Comprehensive Plan, or even a minor one.
Managing Expected Growth			X	The topic of growth and how and where to accommodate it is not addressed in the plan. No details are provided about the amount of vacant land there is that is suitable for new housing or employment.
Job Skills, Employment & Economic Development		X		Economic development is one of the central themes of the Comprehensive Plan. The Economic Development provides some of the most directed recommendations in the Comprehensive Plan. However, the Comp Plan's lack of analysis on employment trends, growth sectors and targets beyond those for downtown is an important omission.
Locating Public Infrastructure			X	The Comp Plan provides little guidance or criteria on locating public facilities. In addition, the general elements do not provide guidance on investment and implementation priorities. There is no link to the city's Capital Improvement Program.

<sup>2</sup> Analysis based on General District Elements of the Comprehensive Plan

Issues	Addressed Thoroughly (Policies/Recommendations supported by analysis of data & issues/trends)		Minimal Guidance/ Not Addressed	Comments
	Addressed Partially (Minimal analysis and connection to issues/trends)			
Fiscal Challenges			X	The District's fiscal framework and challenges are not addressed in a significant manner in the Comp Plan.
Transportation		X		DDOT has a Transportation Vision Plan that is not included or referenced in the Comp Plan. Its major emphases are also not included: transportation safety, traffic calming in neighborhoods, augmentation of the Metrorail system with light rail, and parking management. In addition, the Comp Plan lacks transportation-related maps, a significant omission.
Housing		X		The Housing Element of the Comprehensive Plan includes broad objectives for the improvement of housing and the mix of housing opportunities but does not establish priorities. It leaves much of the work to another time or process.
Anacostia Waterfront		X		The Comp Plan does not address the Anacostia waterfront in a holistic way. Instead, references are included in various elements and in general lack detail.
Transit Oriented Development		X		Although transit oriented development is discussed in numerous places in the Comp Plan, specific policies are absent regarding the desired mix of uses, the uses that are not appropriate at transit station areas, design criteria and standards, and parking.
Parks & Open Space			X	There is no Parks Element of the Comp Plan and the discussion of parks and open space is not prominent within the Comp Plan.

Issues	Addressed Thoroughly (Policies/Recommendations supported by analysis of data & issues/trends)		Minimal Guidance/ Not Addressed	Comments
	Addressed Partially (Minimal analysis and connection to issues/trends)			
Large Sites			X	The development approach and guidance on the development of large sites in not a major focus of the Comp Plan. Some of the large sites are shown as Development Opportunity Areas but there is little policy guidance. There is no listing of large sites or an assessment of their development potential in terms of additional housing units and jobs.
Civic Participation			X	Although “ensuring community input” is one of the ten overall themes of the Comp Plan, civic participation and how to foster it is not addressed in the plan.
Historical Preservation and Urban Design		X		The Preservation Element includes policies and objectives that provide overall direction. A map of historic districts and resources could strengthen it. Also helpful would be text and maps that highlight areas that may be eligible for preservation but require further analysis. Urban design is addressed at the policy level. The Plan includes little specific design guidance and recommends that guidelines be developed. The Plan uses general terms such as development should be “compatible,” which can be interpreted in quite a broad and inconsistent manner.
Special Needs Populations			X	The Human Services Element is the slimmest of all the elements and does not include detailed action steps for implementation of the goals, policies and objectives.
Education/Schools			X	There is no education or schools element in the Comp Plan. Only the school names are listed in the Public Facilities Element but no specific recommendations are included.

## Stakeholder Views

This section highlights stakeholder views on three of the issues identified above and is based on one-on-one interviews with various stakeholders in the planning process (referred to as external stakeholders<sup>3</sup>), the survey responses from members of the Comprehensive Plan Assessment Task Force, and focus group discussions with staff members of numerous city agencies (referred to as internal stakeholders<sup>4</sup>). These were selected as examples of stakeholder views on issues that were seen as important by both internal and external stakeholders.

- Education is one of the top two issues (the other was housing/affordable housing) that surfaced during the external stakeholder interviews conducted as part of the start-up work on the Comprehensive Plan assessment. Comments focused on the need for improvements to the education system; an observation that the District is losing families because of the poor education system; and decrease in the number of District residents entering higher education.

Issues identified by internal stakeholder interviews included the need to examine the opportunities and challenges for the use/adaptive reuse of school facilities for co-location of other city services; the need for affordable housing for teachers; and the opportunity for greater coordination between the District's Public Schools and the Parks and Recreation Department in the provision of recreation facilities.

The Comp Plan does not have an education element and the issue is not comprehensively addressed. Existing schools are listed in the plan's Public Facilities Element but there are no recommendations for programmatic improvements nor strategies or actions outlined for school renovation or potential adaptive reuse.

- Affordable housing is the other top issue raised by external stakeholders and one of the top issues raised by Task Force members. Some highlighted that a great need exists for both quality and safe affordable housing. Others shared that the public perception that affordable housing undermines the quality of life needs to change. Several offered that the escalation of home values and that as a result the middle class is getting priced out of the city. Others noted that opportunities exist to make a difference. One stakeholder shared that "We have an opportunity to ensure that our city stays economically diverse and be a capital of all classes and races."

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<sup>3</sup> During the summer of 2002, the DC Office of Planning conducted a series of external stakeholder interviews to learn how the DC Comp Plan is being used in planning, development, and policy decision-making. Over 20 stakeholders were interviewed, including representatives from a wide range of interest groups.

<sup>4</sup> During September and October, the consultant team interviewed or conducted focus groups with over 35 senior officials in the administration including department heads, deputy mayors, and senior staff charged with planning responsibilities.

Internal stakeholders stated that much of the strategy for affordable housing involves the granting of public benefits (e.g., subsidies, financing strategies, etc.) and identified a need to provide clear guidance on when it is appropriate to grant public benefits and when not. Others expressed the idea that housing improvement strategies are also an economic development activity and that the city should have an integrated strategy. Another issue expressed was that there are many strata of affordable housing serving different income levels and that there is a need to articulate priorities for each group (e.g., very low income, low income, etc.).

The Housing Element of the Comprehensive Plan includes broad objectives for the improvement of housing and the mix of housing opportunities but does not establish priorities. It leaves much of the work to another time or process. For instance, it states that "concrete goals for the location, type, size and cost of new housing units by ward and neighborhood based on a needs assessment study should be conducted every ten years" (Section 302.2(h)).

- Transportation was a topic mentioned frequently in the external interviews and also by Task Force members who answered the survey. So was transit oriented development. The issues identified are multiple and overlapping as demonstrated by these comments: "it is a regional issue, with too many cars entering the city from other jurisdictions;" "there is a federal component to our transportation woes (traffic and parking) and our air quality has been severely impacted as a result." Many stakeholders also focused on strategies for resolving the city's transportation challenges. Some highlighted the need to be more strategic in thinking how to get people from point a to point b; to promote alternative modes of travel, more bike lanes, and to re-evaluate parking, particularly the provision of free parking. Land use strategies to resolve transportation issues also surfaced as well, citing transit oriented development and thinking through how to attract new residents to live near transportation facilities.

Internal district government stakeholders identified that major the emphases of DDOT are not discussed in Comprehensive Plan including transportation safety, transportation calming in neighborhoods, light rail expansion, street closing issues, parking demand management strategies, and management of competing demands for curbside space in commercial areas. In addition, the Transportation Vision Plan was completed before last update of Comprehensive Plan but is not included or referenced. The Transportation Vision Plan is currently being updated. Some internal stakeholders stated that the updated version of the Transportation Vision Plan should become the transportation element of the Comp Plan. Internal stakeholders also suggested that land use and transportation inter-dependencies should be highlighted in the Comprehensive Plan particularly in relation to linking transportation policy and transit oriented development.

## How Do Other Cities' Plans Address Issues and Trends?

This section includes an overview of how plans for other cities address issues and trends. All cities face issues. Some of the cities' plans that were reviewed do address issues and trends well such as Denver, Kansas City, and London. On the other hand, the plan for Atlanta does not address issues well. Table 2 compares the plans of eight city plans, their key issues, and how they were addressed in the plan.

**Table 2: How do Other Cities' Plans Address Issues and Trends**

City	Issues City is Facing	How Addressed in Plan
<b>Atlanta</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dispersed development: extensive job and residential growth at regional level</li> <li>Socio-economic divide in the city</li> </ul>	<p>Lacks fully developed policies and strategies to address issues.</p> <p>Does include policies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve/enhance mobility to improve air quality (support for expanding mass transit service)</li> <li>Listing of public health facilities and empowerment zone projects</li> </ul>
<b>Boston</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transportation congestion</li> <li>Housing affordability</li> <li>Need for new schools</li> </ul>	<p>Developed new plan specifically to address issues from a physical perspective. Policies include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transit-centered urban villages</li> <li>Affordable housing on vacant parcels, stronger partnerships with CDCs</li> <li>School construction and rehabilitation</li> </ul>
<b>Denver</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Population growth (largely outside city)</li> <li>Economic changes (improvements)</li> <li>Housing affordability</li> <li>Changes in federal welfare program</li> </ul>	<p>Policies and strategies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retain and attract residents (which includes preamble for the Land Use and Transportation Plan --- IDs areas for growth)</li> <li>Remain economically competitive such as expanding opportunities for residents in poverty</li> <li>Reinforces policies for increasing housing variety (type and cost)</li> <li>Improve access to personal and economic support systems</li> </ul>
<b>Kansas City</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>History of population decline (but has a recent turnaround)</li> <li>Economic shifts to services</li> <li>Declining tax base</li> </ul> <p>But, developed Policy Plan with public to design strategic direction, which included both physical, human and govt. issues to address</p>	<p>Concluded that policies and strategies needed to be overlapping – so the 5 physical environment plans (e.g., neighborhood prototype plan, preservation plan), the 1 human investment plan, and the 1 government plan incorporate the 12 building blocks (e.g., community anchors, connecting corridors, neighborhood livability, moving about the city)</p>



City	Issues City is Facing	How Addressed in Plan
<b>London</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Population projected to increase substantially</li> <li>Ned to accommodate greater demand for jobs and people</li> <li>Housing crisis (including affordable housing)</li> </ul>	First developed Spatial Development Strategy that develops a physical (transportation and land use vision (map) for city – for where to accommodate jobs, housing. Policies support vision.
<b>Minneapolis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decreases in population although # of households remained the same</li> <li>Changes in population (racial/ethnic diversity as well as concentrated poverty)</li> </ul>	Themes of Plan include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A growing city (includes strategies for where the increases are to occur)</li> <li>Choices to city residents (variety of housing, jobs, recreation)</li> <li>Quality of life</li> <li>Safe place to work and play</li> </ul>
<b>Portland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Channeling growth inside the Urban Growth Boundary</li> </ul>	Strong emphasis on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regional cooperation</li> <li>Alternative transportation</li> <li>Environmental protection</li> </ul>
<b>Seattle</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pressure to accommodate additional population growth</li> <li>Traffic congestion</li> </ul>	Emphasis on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainability (environmental protection, economic security, social equity)</li> <li>Urban Villages: Compact development, public transportation</li> <li>A City for Families: Livable community for families &amp; children</li> </ul>

**Note:** This document includes an analysis of the Comp Plan and examines how it addresses the key issues affecting the District. This is one of the key first steps in the plan assessment process and the anticipated focus of discussion at Task Force meeting 3.

This analysis seeks to assist the Task Force with one of its primary functions: the review, assessment and provision of input on the content of the existing Comprehensive Plan in light of the issues and trends confronting the District the Mayor's Order 2002-122 Establishment – Comprehensive Plan Process Task Force, Section III: Functions, items a: "Review and discuss major issues and trends confronting the District of Columbia as a city;" b. "Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the existing Comprehensive Plan's overall framework, content, and process for amending the Comprehensive Plan;" and d. "Providing input on the content of the existing Comprehensive Plan, in light of issues and trends confronting the District. Based on this input, the Task Force will review, and possibly outline, options for how to improve the content of the Plan."

It also assists in responding to the Council's Resolution: (City Council Resolution 14-431, Sec. 2, e., 8: "The problems inherent in the current Comprehensive Plan and planning process which could be addressed in a revised Comprehensive Plan and planning process."